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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 001241

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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER MELES ON PILLARS OF THE BILATERAL
RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, in a follow-up to a meeting with Ambassador Susan Rice May 16 (septel), underscored to the Ambassador during a private meeting on May 22, the importance of security cooperation, economic development, and governance as pillars in our relationship requiring closer dialogue to bring greater clarity to the relationship. On security cooperation, Meles stressed the need to understand how U.S. policy will unfold in dealing with Somalia, Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and possible post-TFG dynamics. He said regional leaders want to avoid the events of 2005 and 2006 when U.S. support for warlords against the Islamic Courts Union undercut efforts by the African Union and regional states. On economic development, Meles said greater discussion is required on how to combat poverty. He differed, Meles added, with Prime Minister Gordon Brown's call for a &new consensus on development. Finally, on governance, Meles urged for a deeper and more frank bilateral discussion on governance and human rights to enhance understanding on issues which he said were dividing the relationship. End Summary.

SECURITY COOPERATION

¶2. (C) During a private meeting May 22, Prime Minister Meles expounded on the points he discussed with Ambassador Susan Rice last week. The PM focused on three critical "pillars" of the bilateral relationship requiring closer dialogue to bring greater clarity of understanding and resolution of potential problems. The U.S. and Ethiopia have a common perspective and shared interests on security cooperation in the region. But the Prime Minister noted that he and his government look to forward to a greater understanding of U.S. policy, especially towards Somalia. He raised the problems in 2005 and 2006 when the U.S. -- without consulting Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and the African Union -- unilaterally funneled funds to dubious warlords fighting the emerging Islamic Courts Union. Meles said the regional leaders would have welcomed private discussions with the U.S. on the policy it was pursuing in Somalia. Meles did not criticize the U.S. approach, rather he emphasized that a serious and focused dialogue would have allowed regional leaders an opportunity to adjust their approaches, coordinate better with the U.S. and, more importantly, make clear to the U.S. their concerns about the consequences of the U.S. policy towards the warlords.

13. (C) Meles said that now it was urgent to have a closer dialogue and understanding of U.S. policy on dealing with the TFG. Meles said he and other leaders want to understand current U.S. policy on Somalia, what changes the U.S. is making to address the current problems, and scenarios for a Somalia with and without the TFG, with and without al-Shabaab, and approaches to various groups like Alhu Sunna Wal Jama'a (ASWJ).

14. (C) Meles emphasized to the Ambassador that Ethiopia has made it a point to "carry its own weight" in the pursuit of common security goals. He added that Ethiopia does not seek to "make a buck" out of the relationship by supporting U.S. programs, but rather that Ethiopia agrees to support the U.S. out of shared values and interests. But in this context, the Prime Minister wanted U.S. understanding and support for issues of concern to Ethiopia, specifically positions on domestic insurgent groups such as the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). If it is the policy of the U.S. to support these two insurgent groups then there should be a dialogue to make clear the position of both sides, Meles argued. At the end of the day, if there are fundamental differences, at least the Ethiopian side will understand the reasons for U.S. policy towards these two insurgent groups. Meles claimed that the current situation is generating mistrust, because the Ethiopian military, for instance, believes the U.S. military seeks clandestine contacts with the ONLF for its own force protection and perhaps other "unknown" reasons. There should be "transparent engagement" on all issues to clearly lay out what the U.S. expects of Ethiopia and what each country seeks

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to achieve in its respective policy pursuits.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

15. (C) Meles noted that during the April G-20 summit in London, Prime Minister Gordon Brown spoke of the need for a "new consensus" on development to replace the "Washington consensus." Meles said that, rather than a consensus, pragmatism was required. Meles echoed the arguments he made on behalf of the African countries at the G-20 summit that economic performance should factor more into the distribution of assistance. This more pragmatic approach will help reward those countries pursuing successful sustainable development and good development performance policies.

16. (C) Part of good economic performance is efficiency, and NGOs are by nature inefficient, Meles argued. The Prime Minister said that USAID has the only bilateral aid agreement with Ethiopia that allows for NGOs to operate in-country. Agreements with the U.K.'s DFID and other countries do not allow for NGO operations. Meles said he understands that the delivery mechanism for U.S. aid must go through NGOs. But this has become more "ideological" than practical in the U.S. Many NGOs are inefficient, too expensive, and USAID can deliver the assistance more effectively and faster if it works directly with government entities, cutting out NGOs, Meles argued.

GOVERNANCE

17. (C) Meles said his government is very unhappy over Ethiopia's treatment on human rights issues. The Congress and the State Department's Human Rights Report have been sympathetic to the U.S.-based Ethiopian diaspora and its highly vocal anti-Ethiopian government rhetoric, the Prime Minister argued. Referring to the U.S. Congress and State Department Human Rights report interchangeably, Meles said Ethiopia is committed to democracy and he accepts that Ethiopia must be held accountable to democratic values. He added that he wants a closer dialogue with the U.S. to allow Ethiopia to separately -- or jointly with the U.S. --

investigate charges of human rights abuse. If found to be true, Ethiopia should be criticized. He stressed that such problems would be corrected and this required a cooperative relationship to work together to investigate, address issues, and correct problems. Meles added that there are problems and his government has addressed such issues and continues to investigate. He expressed appreciation for recent discussions between Embassy and Foreign Ministry on modalities to more credibly pursue claims of human rights abuses, and urged a more comprehensive and detailed dialogue on the subject. Meles concluded by saying that Ethiopia's frustration comes from differing treatment by the U.S. towards Ethiopia and Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia or Egypt. Ethiopia asks that treatment of all countries, partners or not, be on the same level under the same criteria.

COMMENT

18. (C) The Ambassador has spoken at great length with Foreign Minister Seyoum and Communications Minister Bereket Simon -- the architect behind the media attacks on the State Department Human Rights report -- on the process for drafting the report and also the need for greater transparency and understanding from the Ethiopian side to verify information, which is extremely difficult given Ethiopia's closed society.

But it is clear from our discussions that the problem is not our human rights report, it is Ethiopia's anxiety over the relationship. Ethiopian had not responded to our annual report until now. The Prime Minister's call for "closer dialogue" and "improved understanding" stems from their feeling that the U.S. will somehow change its policy towards Ethiopia. The Prime Minister's lengthy meeting with Ambassador Susan Rice and the prospects for senior bilateral meetings have helped meet the Ethiopians' need for clarity from the U.S. on the relationship. But, follow-up on any senior bilateral level meeting will be essential and be dependent on a very consistent message with full interagency support on our core issues on security, development, and governance. End Comment.

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